

CHAPTER TWO

Communism, Nationalism, and Imperialism in Caucasia and Central Asia

^•r THEN, in March of 1917, the democratic government of Lvov and V V Kerensky succeeded the autocratic monarchy in Russia, echoes of this event were heard in the non-Russian border regions of the Empire. The momentary weakness of Russia presented to the subject nations of the Empire a unique opportunity for emancipation. The new government could not expect the border regions to be willing to continue as oppressed vassals. Yet it was not at all certain that the March Revolution in Russia would necessarily result in die complete severance of links between the center and the border regions. The new regime, pledged to democracy and honest parliamentarism, might introduce such liberal conditions in the Empire and grant such generous representation of border regions in the parliament and administration that separation would not be necessary. Indeed, with some kind of broad autonomy based on equality, the advantages of belonging to a larger political structure might eventually outweigh the

gains of self-determination and complete sovereignty.

Thus the border regions were faced with two alternatives: either self-determination pushed to the extreme or the maintenance of links with Russia on an autonomous basis. As long as Russia had democratic government, the border regions preferred autonomy to separation. Nevertheless, the first news about the revolution in Petrograd acted like strong wine on the imagination of border-region patriots.